News release

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Met Office guides space collaboration

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Four leading UK government agencies, led by the Met Office, have joined forces to help fund the new ocean-observing satellite known as Jason-2. Future climate patterns will depend heavily on how the atmosphere and oceans interact. Jason-2 will help meteorological and environmental organisations to monitor these patterns.

Jason-2 will measure the topography of the ocean surface in order to provide a globally complete observation of sea level, to derive current structures such as eddies and the Gulf Stream and to monitor global climate interactions between the sea and the atmosphere. Jason-2's predecessor, Jason-1, was launched in December 2001, as a joint US/French mission, with the same instrumentation, a radar altimeter, as Jason-2, but with the additional objective of having to demonstrate the technology.

Jason-2 is to be launched in 2007 on a mission of at least five years and will continue the unique record provided by these high-precision altimeters. It is a four-way collaboration between research and operational agencies in the USA and Europe - National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES) and European Organisation for the Exploitation of Meteorological Satellites (EUMETSAT). But, unlike Jason-1, it will also be used operationally.

The UK has signed up to a 10.05% share of the EUMETSAT Jason-2 Programme. The UK contribution, about £2.4 million over nine years, is being jointly funded by the Ministry of Defence, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Natural Environment Research Council and the Met Office.

Peter Ewins, the Met Office's Chief Executive, said: "This collaboration is good for the partner agencies, meeting their various requirements. It also demonstrates that the agencies, working together, can ensure that the UK remains a major player in important international programmes."

Because the oceans are so large, remote sensing from satellites is the only way to gain truly global information about phenomena such as ocean circulation and how it changes in time. European oceanographers agreed a few years ago that the Jason class of radar altimeter would provide the most useful addition to the otherwise available ocean observations, in terms of improving the performance of computer models of the world's oceans. Analyses and predictions made by such models are used operationally by the Royal Navy, by environmentalists monitoring the climate and for oceanographic research.

For further information:
Met Office Press Office +44 (0)1392 886655

Met Office Customer Centre 0870 900 0100
If you're outside the UK +44 (0)1392 885680

Notes

The Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales is based in France. EUMETSAT is an intergovernmental organisation that establishes and maintains operational meteorological satellites for 18 European States and four Co-operating States

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